HISTORY
of
ODESSA DELAWARE

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Address of
CHIEF JUSTICE LORE
at the
Methodist Episcopal Church

November 18, 1901

HISTORY OF ODESSA

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AT St. Paul's M. E. Church, Odessa, yesterday, services incident to the re-opening of the church were concluded with all day services. In the evening the principal speaker was Chief Justice Charles B. Lore of this city, who spoke on the history of Odessa and the history of the church. The building was crowded and a large number of the old friends of the Chief Justice lingered after the service in order to express their pleasure at seeing him in his old home again. In his address the Chief Justice said:

"On this, the historical night of your services, we naturally drift into reminiscenses.

"First as to our town; once the nameless hamlet, then Cantwell's Bridge and now Odessa.

"Alexander De Hirjossa, (Vice-Director of New Amstel—now New Castle—under the Dutch from 1659 to 1663), after he retired from the office, obtained possession of a large tract of land at Appoquinimink, which embraces Odessa. He was settled on his plantation but a few months when the British conquered the Dutch and took possession. His lands were confiscated and granted to Edmund Cantwell about 1676. Captain Edmund Cantwell was the first sheriff of New Castle county under the government of William Penn. He was also high sheriff under Sir Edmund Andross in 1676. He died in 1698 and his estate passed to his son Richard. In 1731 the General Court of the province granted permission to Richard Cantwell to erect a toll bridge over the Appoquinimink at the place where the present bridge now stands. The place then took the name of Cantwell's Bridge and was well known as a stopping place for persons travelling from the Delaware to the Chesapeake.

"In 1765 William Corbit bought land near the creek and opened a tan-yard at the old tan-yard site. The house now occupied by Daniel W. Corbit was erected by William Corbit in 1733. This house was built by the English firm Robert May & Co.

"In 1817 when Charles Tatman (whom many of you knew) came to this town, there were about thirty residences, all of which were situate on the south or west side of Main street. Dr. William Smith, a Scotch physician, owned all the land on the north or east side of Main street. He left the place making no disposition of his property, which thereupon escheated the estate. By an act of the Legislature, passed February 2, 1821, John Merritt, Outten David, Jacob Vandegrift, John Reynolds and John Clark were appointed commissioners to lay out the land into lots with streets and lanes. Jonas C. Fairlamb was the surveyor. John Lowber, the public escheater, sold the lots at public sale.

"Scharff in his history of Delaware, from which I quote quite largely, says: 'In 1825 Cantwell's Bridge was a place of considerable importance.' (In this presence I dare not say otherwise now). Charles Tatman and Manlove Hayes were merchants at that time. The hotel was conducted by Fred. Mansfield, David Wilson and William Polk were dealing largely in grain. At this time Cantwell's Bridge was the principal grain market for the surrounding country. Grain was conveyed here for shipment, from all points within a radius of twelve or fifteen miles. Six large graneries, holding about 30,000 bushels, standing on the bank of the Appoquinimink, were often completely filled; which delayed the purchase of grain until some of it was shipped to Philadelphia. From 1820 to 1840 there were shipped from this town 400,000 bushels of grain annually.

"John Janvier (the grandfather of our present deputy clerk of the peace, George Janvier) was the undertaker at this time and owned a two-wheeled hearse, which was used when anyone of wealth or high social standing was buried. On other occasions an ordinary wagon was used. The coffin was placed on the axle and held in position by wooden screws. This was in use until 1840. John Aspril (the father of our friend Leonard V. Aspril) was the blacksmith and wheelwright of the town, and the tanning was managed by Daniel Corbit, who was the father of your townsmen, John C. Corbit and Daniel W. Corbit.

"As early as 1830 agricultural fairs were held at Cantwell's Bridge and were largely attended by people from Delaware, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

"During the busy season, six sloops made weekly trips to Philadelphia, and three coasting schooners went to Boston and the East, besides a large number of transient vessels.

"In 1855, by vote of the people in town meeting, the name of the town was changed from Cantwell's Bridge to Odessa. It was named after Odessa in Russia, a large grain port on the Black sea. The Delaware railroad soon diverted the grain trade, and Odessa by the irony of fate ceased to be much of a grain mart. I was an active participant in that town meeting, and opposed most vehemently any change of name; but urging if change should be made the name should be Kirkwood, after the gallant Delaware captain of revolutionary fame, who after the close of the revolutionary war established himself in mercantile business in this town in a house standing to the east of the old tavern just on the brow of the hill. In 1785 he removed to St. Georges. He was killed November 4, 1791, at the St. Clair massacre in Ohio, in this his thirty-third and last battle. Lieutenant Michael McDonough, a native of this hundred, was also killed in the same battle.

"To me the name of Cantwell's Bridge was dear. Her homes, her people, even her cats and dogs were all mingled with the association of my childhood and my heart then rebelled against the Russian name, Odessa. But ambition prevailed, our grain merchants fondly dreamed we were to rival our great namesake on the Black sea, and become a great grain mart. I knew every crook and crevice, street and alley of Cantwell's

Bridge. I have always felt a great pride in her good name and prosperity.

"Here in the old stone house, just opposite the warerooms of L. V. Aspril & Sons, was born Commodore Thomas Brown of the United States Navy. He entered the navy as a midshipman; was at the seize of Tripoli and was there wounded. He commanded the Governor Tompkins and afterwards the Oneda under Commodore Chauncy on Lake Ontario during the war of 1812-14, and was afterward in command of the United States fleet in the Mediterranean. He wore his uniform for the last time as a pall-bearer at the funeral of Commodore McDonough in 1825. Commodore McDonough and he were both natives of this hundred and were born within two miles of each other.

"To me it has ever been a matter of regret that the name Kirkwood was not adopted in honor of our distinguished townsman, who was one of the bravest and most esteemed of Delaware's revolutionary soldiers. With the Delaware veterans he was in the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, the disastrous field of Camden under General Gates, also at Gilford Court House, at Waxhaw and at Ninety-six. The historian says of him that he was 'wherever dangers thicken or bravery invincible was demanded.'

"The people of Odessa have ever been noted for their intelligence and morality. The Quakers erected their meeting house here in 1783, Old Drawyer

Presbyterian Church, with her long line of gifted preachers, was a potential factor in enlightening and refining the people of the entire section.

"Methodist services were first held in the town in 1831. There were then but two Methodists living in the town, Wessell Aldrich and his sister, Mrs. Rebecca Pogue, and they were both members of Union Church on Smyrna circuit.

"In 1830, at a meeting held at Fieldsborough, among the converts were Benjamin Fields, Nelson Naudain, Elias Naudain, Thomas Scott (brother of Bishop Levi Scott) and James V. Moore. By their efforts Methodist churches were established in Cantwell's Bridge in 1831; first in the school house for two years, then in a little stone church built on the site of the present church, which was torn down when the present structure was built in 1852, and dedicated on October 23 of that year.

"The membership, growth and influence of this church is to-night the special province of my friend Aspril, who is the living exposition of Odessa Methodism, and I will not trespass on his preserve.

"There is one name, however, closely identified with Methodism in this place that abides with me and claims our special attention. That name is Levi Scott.

"He was born in a one-story house built of poplar logs, situate on the banks of the Appoquinimink, a short distance below Cantwell's Bridge, October 11, 1802. His father, the Rev. Thomas Scott, was of

Scotch-Irish stock and his mother of English blood. Her father was John March, who owned a beautiful farm near Centreville, Md. The bishop had one brother of the whole blood, Thomas Scott. Their father was a farmer of limited means and a zealous and efficient local preacher. In 1802 he was received on trial in the Philadelphia Annual Conference, and on the eleventh day of June of the same year, died at the home of James Bateman in Centreville, Md., of bilious fever, whilst out on circuit work. This left their mother to battle alone in life with three small children and the farm heavily cumbered with debt. She was a woman of great strength of character. After much doubt and misgiving she concluded to remain on the farm and so managed that the farm was soon cleared of debt.

"Levi was full of life. Ardent, gifted and somewhat intractable he needed the guiding hand of just such a mother. It is said just before the father died he took Levi, then a babe, in his arms, and said to his wife: 'My dear, I will exchange with you; you may have Thomas and this shall be my boy.'

"He then most solemnly and impressively dedicated him to God, and invoked his richest blessings upon him. The prattling infant could know nothing of the significance of this dedication, but the boy nevertheless became one of the most efficient workers for good. The mother took the children to church regularly on Sunday, and saw to their moral training. The bishop in a short memoir says of his mother: 'Every night before we retired to rest and on Sabbath morning and night, a hymn or part of a hymn was sung, my mother leading it, after which she prayed. There was another getting ready for bed, and that was saying our Lord's prayer. She took us regularly to meeting at the old Union Meeting House on Sabbath morning, and required us to read portions of the Bible to her in the afternoon and evening. How familiar the sound of her voice on Sabbath morning: "Come boys, put the horse to the carriage and let's go to meeting." '

"Levi worked diligently on the farm until he was seventeen, going to the district school in the winter. There was a good shad fishery on the creek, 300 yards back of the house. Levi helped draw the net and was a fisherman like those of the disciples of Christ at Galilee. At seventeen he went to Georgetown, D. C., to learn the trade of carpenter with a relative, W. Fuest. But under the advice of a physician gave it up and came home in the fall of the same year. He then went with John Janvier of Cantwell's Bridge to learn cabinet making, and remained with him until 1824, when he and his half brother, John Lattomus, set up wheelwrighting at Fieldsborough. The next year he gave up the business to his brother and became tutor for the children of A. S. Naudain and other select families in the neighborhood, where he remained until the following year, when he became an itinerant preacher. His first appointment was Talbot Circuit, Md. And then in order, Dover Circuit, Del.; St. Georges Charge, Philadelphia; West Chester and Marshallton, Smyrna Circuit; then Kent

Circuit, Md. In 1834 he was appointed presiding elder of the Delaware District, and was reappointed in 1835. In 1836 he was sent to Franklin Street Newark, N. J., then to Ebeneezer Church, Philadelphia. In 1836 he was elected a delegate to the General Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1839 he was appointed to St. Paul's, Philadelphia, in 1840, at the earnest request of Dr. Derbin, then president of Dickinson College, he took charge of the grammar school of the college and remained there four years. The same year he was a delegate to the General Conference, which met at Baltimore. He returned to the pastorate in 1843, and was stationed at Union Church, Philadelphia. While here he was elected to the memorable General Conference of 1844, at which the slavery question split the church into two great bodies—the M. E. Church and the M. E. Church South. He was presiding elder of the South Philadelphia District from 1845 to 1849. In 1846 Delaware College conferred upon him the degree of D. D. He was a delegate to the General Conference in 1848, which met in Baltimore, where he was elected assistant book agent to George Lane of the great Methodist book concern in New York. The imprint of Lane & Scott is found upon all the Methodist publications of that day. In 1852 at the General Conference held in Boston he was elected bishop, the highest office in the church, and when he died, July 13, 1882, at his home (Itinerants Lodge) in the eightieth year of his age, he was our honored senior bishop.

"I have thus outlined a life of almost unexampled activity and usefulness, running through eighty years from the unlettered country school boy, who says of himself that at the age of 20 years he did not know the meaning of the words 'English grammar,' up to the honored senior bishop of our church.

"For fifty-seven years he was in the ministry in the work of saving human souls. Four times presiding elder, four times delegate to the General Conference, four years principal of Dickinson College Grammar School, four years assistant book agent, and thirty years as bishop, fill up the measure of an extraordinary life. In every one of these offices he met the full measure of usefulness and expectation.

"It will be interesting as well as profitable to consider some of the traits that enabled this Appoquinimink plow boy to become the head and front of this great religious denomination.

"Bishop Scott was converted October 16, 1822, at a Methodist meeting held at the house of a respected colored man named Carter at Fieldsborough. The bishop writes of his conversion as follows: 'I can never forget that night. I was just five days past 20 years of age. All nature seemed to sympathize in the wondrous joy.' As a boy he was full of spirit and ambitious, a little wild at times, and gave his mother much concern. Genial, masterful, impulsive and an admirable performer upon the violin, he soon became the center of the social circle. No social gathering or jollification in the neighborhood was complete without Levi Scott. He loved his violin and clung to it until his conversion. He then, in deference to public sentiment, exchanged it for a German flute. There was a winsome gentleness, a considerate deference for others in his manner that early made him a favorite. Boys instinctively render homage to a pure disinterested nature. They love a manly boy and hate a mean one. His constitution was delicate, and several times during his long life ran down and compelled him to take spells of rest from his intense labor.

"One masterful trait of his character was conscientious thoroughness. His work was always well done, whatever it might be. He slighted nothing. Again, he was thoroughly sincere and disliked sham. The key of his success unquestionably was incessant work.

"While learning cabinet-making with John Janvier, he would keep his book open before him and read every leisure moment. At Dickinson College while teaching others he spent all his leisure time in higher studies and in broad mental culture. In the book rooms it was his judgment that determined what was fit for publication. As presiding elder and bishop his judgment of men was clear and generally correct. He was particularly noted for broad grasp of constitutional and fundamental questions in church polity. His sermons were most effective. He was a man of faith and prayer, with a gentle melodious voice, solemn and dignified manner, he presented his subjects with great power. The Rev. John S. Inskip, who was converted under his preaching, says of him: 'We, however, knew and appreciated him most as a preacher. He was the most incisive preacher we ever heard. Such preaching is seldom heard in these days. We knew, admired and loved him in all the responsible positions he occupied in the church, but it was as a preacher and pastor we knew and appreciated him most.'

"He spent much time on his knees in private prayer. A minister stopping with him on one occasion, early in the morning, heard the voice of the bishop in the next room apparently in earnest conversation with some one; upon going to the bishop's room, he found him on his knees in prayer. The friend says it seemed as if God was in the room, and the bishop was holding a low voice conversation with him; that he was talking with a present Savior. From the noise some people make in prayer one would think God was afar off. The kneeling posture seemed to be a favorite one with him. Sometimes for recreation he would take a gunning trip. Frederick Conner of Accomac county, Virginia, whom the bishop was visiting on one occasion, says he and the bishop at times went gunning together. Once he was badly beaten by his preacher friend in shooting squirrels. He attributed the bishop's success to the fact that he always knelt before firing.

"The Rev. Andrew Manship in his book "Thirteen Years in the Itineracy,' has this to say of Bishop Scott and this church:

" 'A modern M. E. church was consecrated on October of this year (1852) to the worship of Almighty God at Cantwell's Bridge, now Odessa, New Castle county, Delaware. Bishop Scott preached in the morning to a delighted audience. This is the native place of Bishop Scott and no minister could be more universally esteemed than he in that region of country. At night it was my privilege to preach in the new temple. I do not wish to speak to the disparagement of other churches in Delaware, but I am compelled to say, this in my opinion is unsurpassed for neatness, substantiability, suitability and beauty. One of the most interesting things about it is its freedom from debt. I well remember a fact with which I was that day made acquainted. The builder complained that he had lost money by the transaction. Be it spoken, however, to his credit, he did not slight the job and his work will praise him. The trustees and congregation were both generously disposed, and as there was a sufficiency of funds subscribed and given in the morning to cover the claim, at night there were a few hundred dollars subscribed as a donation to the builder. This looked to me highly honorable and Christian like, and the impression made upon me that day both in regard to the minister, the Rev. Joseph Aspril and his flock was that they delighted to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God. Bishop Scott was at that time on the eve of sailing for Africa. He nobly on that day made a subscription, saying: "If I live to return from Africa I will pay it,' unexpectedly, however, to him, before we left that town, by the kindness of some of his numerous friends, this matter was adjusted and duly paid.'

"Among the earliest labors of Bishop Scott after his election as bishop, was his official visit to Liberia. He sailed from Baltimore in the bark Shirley, Captain Chosen, November 29, 1852, and anchored in Monrovia Roadstead, January 6, 1853, after a voyage of thirty-seven days. His experience, labors and life while in Africa, are artlessly told by him in a diary kept by him at the time, which is well worth reading.

"In all fields, no bishop of the Church worked more faithfully or acceptably than he. He commanded the confidence and love of all. At his funeral Bishop Simpson characterized his life by saying: 'He had wide views and a loving heart; he was a wise, careful and judicious overseer of God's Church.'

"By hard study he overcame the lack of early education. He became a good Greek and Latin scholar and linguist, and was broadly educated by hard study and contact with men.

"His home for the last twenty years of his life was the old homestead on Appoquinimink creek, to which he had given the name of 'Itinerants' Lodge.' Here he spent the last days of his life in much affliction. In 1879 he lost his dearly beloved wife. In May, 1880 he was stricken with paralysis and his powers began to wane. He felt the end was nigh.

"He loved this home of his birth and childhood, the old log house in which he was born, was converted into a workhouse and granary, when the new dwelling was built, and it is now in a state of perfect preservation. In 1880 Dr. E. H. Stokes of Ocean Grove, N. J., and Dr. Matlack visited the bishop. While there, they entered what had been in its day a first-class log-house, the logs, which were yellow poplar, instead of being rough-hewed, had been neatly sawed and some of them were fifteen inches through. I suppose, said the bishop, they are one hundred years old, and as he struck his cane against them, remarked, I think they are good for a hundred years to come. 'There,' said the bishop, as we stood in the front room, 'is the place where seventy-eight years and one month ago, I first saw the light; and there in the same spot several years ago, my mother died.'

"This house is now the property of his son-in-law, our friend, George L. Townsend. It should be religiously preserved as one of Delaware's historic buildings.

"The farm consisted of about 130 acres of excellent land. The bishop knew every rood of that land and every turn and shady nook in the creek. For him the old trees had records and legends.

"Boy and man, he belonged to the people of that community. For miles around his home, 'Itinerants' Lodge.' He walked among his neighbors with unaffected modesty; all loved him. In all his business relations he so conducted himself that after his death, the sentiment of the people was voiced by one of his humblest neighbors, who was not a member of the church, in these words: 'Bishop Scott was a square man.' Well would it be if professing

Christians lived so that it might be said of each when he died, 'He was a square man.'

"The bishop was a liberal contributor to this Church. In his last years until prevented by infirmity, he was quite regular in attendance upon its services. He occupied a chair placed for him within the chancel, and no one could have been a more attentive listener or a more devout worshipper. His prayer after sermon was often thrilling in its pathos and power, and the solemn and impressive benediction with which the venerable man dismissed the congregation, seemed sometimes to be descending from the skies. As he feebly tottered down the aisle there were numbers who tarried and clasped hands with him and received his affectionate greeting. He assisted in the administration of the Lord's Supper, until he dared no longer trust himself to bear the emblems to the communicants; but even after that time, on several occasions, he sat wearily and dismissed the tables, while the lingering people were bathed in tears. He has gone out of the community and away from the church, revered, beloved, lamented.

"Of the seven children born to him only two survive. The Rev. Alfred Scott of Wilmington, and Cornelia, the wife of George L. Townsend of Odessa. To them and to his gifted grandchildren, as well as to this community, he has left a priceless heritage, a spotless name and a life of singular purity and power.

"I regard Levi Scott as one of the greatest men this peninsula has produced, measuring him by all the rules of elemental manhood."